

# Paying for education must go beyond classrooms, advocates say

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In this photo taken Thursday, Oct. 2, 2014, a fifth grader writes during class at John Hay Elementary school in Seattle. Public school teachers paid most of the bill for the education lawsuit that is forcing the Washington Legislature to... (AP Photo/Elaine Thompson) More

**Adequate funding for education doesn't mean classrooms alone, argues a team of youth advocates who have filed a brief with the state Supreme Court.**

By Claudia Rowe  
The Seattle Times

The McCleary school-funding lawsuit, hurtling toward a showdown between lawmakers and the state Supreme Court, is generally understood as a fight over how much Washington must provide for its public schools.

But a group of high-profile civil rights advocates have added a new wrinkle to the question.

Thousands of schoolchildren — many of them kids of color — rely on welfare, food stamps, housing subsidies and other social services. Squeezing those programs in the name of McCleary would undercut efforts to narrow the widening gap in achievement between children of different racial groups, said the coalition, which includes Columbia Legal Services, Washington Low Income Housing Alliance, Children's Alliance and the Equity in Education Coalition.

"For low-income students and students of color facing the barriers created by poverty and institutionalized racism, what happens outside school is just as important to their education as what happens inside the classroom," the coalition noted in a brief filed with the Supreme Court last month.

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Nearly half the state's school children — 4 in 10 — live in low-income families. An estimated 35,000 students are homeless. Another 5,000 are in foster care and, as a group, have the lowest graduation and highest dropout rates of any students in Washington.

Providing them an adequate education means addressing disadvantages that exist outside the classroom, said Rachael Myers, executive director of the housing group.

"Sacrificing one to fund the other is like cutting off the head to save the body," Myers said.

The McCleary decision addresses funding for basic education. It is not, technically, a civil-rights ruling. But Sharonne Navas, executive director of the Equity in Education Coalition, believes that lens is crucial to equalizing outcomes between richer and poorer schools.

"We knew there would be other briefs focused on overall school funding," she said. "But that's not the only thing the state needs to look at. We wanted to focus on the civil rights around funding."

The Legislature has until 2018 to fully comply with the McCleary ruling, which found in 2012 that Washington was not adequately funding basic education. The state has made

some progress, but on Thursday, the Supreme Court ordered state lawyers to a Sept. 7 hearing aimed at determining whether it has been enough.

“I’m hopeful that the court will come back with something stronger” than a fine, Navas said. “I’m hopeful that it will be holding the decision-makers accountable.”

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